

INTRODUCTION

Śrīgaṇeśapurāṇa was, perhaps, first published in 1892 (Bombay, Gopāla Nārāyaṇa Press) in ms. Form, as edited by Uddhavācārya Aināpure and Kṛṣṇa Śāstrī Pitrye. Gaṇeśagita - Anandasrama Press, Poona, published a section of this Purana in 1906 together with Nilakantha's commentary Ganapati-bhavadipika (edited by the Pandits of the Anandasrama) by Anandasrama Press, Poona.

This Purana finds a first place in Gaṇeśa Grantha Section of the illustrious work Sri Gaṇeśakosa (ed. Amarendra Gadgil, Srirama Book Agency, Pune, second edition 1981).

The edition of the Purana together with Marathi translation by V.S.S. Visnusastri Bapat, published by Damodar Laksmana Lele (Modavrtta Chapakhana, Wai, 1905-6) was perhaps the first attempt to popularize this illustrious text on Gaṇeśa. This has also been long out of print.

Thus it is quite in the fitness of things that M/S Nag Publishers should have thought of bringing out a reprint of Srīgaṇeśa Purana - one of the two Upapuranas (Mudgalapurana being the other one) solely dealing with Gaṇeśa as the Supreme Divine Power.

The Gaṇeśapurana Itself describes itself as an Upapurana:

अन्यान्युपपुराणानि वर्तन्तेऽष्टादशैव च ।

गाणेश नारदीयं च नृसिंहादीन्यथापि च ॥ I.1.8 ॥

It is, however not listed among the eighteen upapuranas mentioned in the Kurmapuranas, as follows:

अन्यान्युपपुराणानि मुनिभिः कथितानितु ।

अष्टादश पुराणानि श्रुत्वा संक्षेपतो द्विजाः ॥

आद्यं सनत्कुमारोक्तं नारसिंहमतः परम् ।

तृतीयं 'स्कान्दमुद्दिष्ट' कुमारेण तु भाषितम् ॥

चतुर्थं शिवधर्माख्यं साक्षान्नन्दीशभाषितम् ।

दुर्वाससोक्तभाश्चर्यं नारादीयमतः परम् ॥

²कापिल वामनञ्चैव तथैवोशनसेरितम् ।

ब्रह्माण्डं वारुणञ्चैव कालिकाह्वयमेव च ॥

माहेश्वरं तथा ³साम्बं सौरं सर्वार्थसञ्चयम् ।

⁴पराशरोक्त मारीचं तथैव भार्गवाह्वयम् ॥⁵

Preceding pada reads as नन्दिकेश्वरयुग्मञ्च

The variants noted in the footnote are from the sabda-Kalpadruma, which defines Upapurana as “(उपमितं पुराणैः) व्यासकृताष्टादशपुराणसदृशनानामुन्यादिप्रणीताष्टादश पुराणम्” and quotes the above verses with variants from “मलमासतत्त्वधृतकूर्मपुराणम्”. The lexicon also defines दैव as देवीपुराणम्. But the fact remains that neither the Venkateshvar press edition (Reprint, Nag Publisher,

Delhi 1983) of the Kurmapurana nor the representative quotations therefrom as in the Sabdakalpadruma list Srīgaṇeśa-Purana as an upapurana. M W has slightly different a version of the Kurmapurana's listing of the upapuranas as follows:

“Upa-puranam n. a secondary or minor Purana (eighteen are enumerated; the following) is the list in the Kurma-Purana: 1. Sanatkumara. 2. Narasimha (fr. Nrsimha). 3. Bhamda. 4. Sivadharma 5. Daurvasasa. 6. Naradiya. 7. Kapila. 8. Vamana. 9. Ausanasa 10. Brahmanda 11. Varuna. 12. Kalika-purana. 13. Mahesvara 14. Samba. 15. Saura. 16. Parasara. 17. Marica. 18. Bhargava)”.

The above listing tallies with the one as in the Venkateshvar Press edition of the Kurmapurana except that the third upapurana named here is Bhamda which could be a printing error for Skanda. There is no Vayaviya, no kalki, no Daiva here.

Are we now to conclude that Srīgaṇeśapurana was not known to the author of the Kurmapurana? But the fact that at least the Gaṇeśagita forming part of the Gaṇeśapurana (as already available in print) was commented upon by Nilakantha establishes the relative antiquity of this Purana. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that Bhargava and Gaṇeśa Puranas are

one and the same, inasmuch as the extant text of the Srigaṇeśa Purana represents a dialogue between the Trikalajna Sage Bhṛgu and leprosy-stricken king of Saurashtra-Somakanta. So this Purana may have earlier been named as Bhārgava Purana.

Like the two Great Epics and Dharmasastra, the Puranas are also traditionally categorized as “Smṛti”. Corresponding to the transmission of the various Sakhas of Śruti from generation to generation in the respective families, through oral tradition, the various Puranas/upapuranas were also perhaps orally transmitted from generation to generation in the families concerned. Some beginning has already been made in the direction of stylistic studies into the distinctive features of the Mahabharata as an oral composition (Vide Sharma, Elements of poetry in the Mahabharata, Berkeley 1964; Reprint, Delhi 1988). No such a study seems yet to have been made with regard to the Puranas in general or even a specific Purana. It is unfortunate that except four or five Puranas that have been critically edited and brought out under the auspices of the All India Kashiraj Trust no critical editions of the Puranas or Upapuranas are yet available. Even the editions available are full of printing and other errors (except the Srimadbhagvatam).

To my mind a stylistic study with special reference to oral poetic technique as reflected in the Puranas and identification of the oft-repeated poetic formula in the Noun-adjective combination, similes, vocatives etc. should be since quite a long time for all further Puranic studies. That will enable us to determine the common core and distinctive features of a given Purana / Upapurana. That will also help us in determining the relative priority or posteriority of a Purana.

As regards this Purana, it must have attained eminence centuries earlier than Nilakantha (16th cen.) According to R.C. Hazra “it cannot be dated earlier than 1100 A.D.” On the basis of some internal and external evidence, he further concludes that “the date of the Gaṇeśa P. falls between 1100 and 1400 A.D.”

As stated above, the Puranas too form part of our oral tradition. We can certainly try to determine the date of a text when it was standardized in the process of its oral evolution and was written down. But it is perhaps not possible to determine even approximately, the date of the beginning of an oral tradition with regard to a particular text, specially when no critical edition representing the oldest available reading of the

text is accessible to us. We can thus only conclude that the Gaṇeśa Purana was written down long before the 16th cen. A.D., may be, between 1100 - 1400 A.D.

As usual, Gaṇeśa Purana is also recited by Suta in the naimisaranya in the course of the twelve-year sacrifice performed by Saunaka. The sages have already grasped the eighteen Puranas. Now they request Suta to recite other Puranas (anyany api). So Suta prefers to recite the first upapurana dealing with Gaṇeśa. The order of transmission of this Gaṇeśapurana is mentioned as Brahma-Vyasa-Bhṛgu.

Eventually Somakanta suffers from leprosy. Despite the appeals to the contrary from his ministers, subjects, family members, he desperately prefers to relinquish his throne. The unwilling son-Hemakantha is compelled to succeed him. Somakanta, together with his wife Sudharma and the two ministers - Subala and Jnanagamyā quits his kingdom and ultimately reaches a beautiful forest. The king sleeps. The two ministers go somewhere in search for fruits etc. at that moment Sudharma comes across a brilliant child on the bank of a pond and she relates the entire story of her husband's ailments to him.

The child is none else but cyavana himself who conveys the entire story to his father - Bhrgu. Somakanta is summoned to Bhrgu's hermitage. Being asked by the sage, somakanta tells him everything about himself as it happened in this life. The compassionate sage first starts telling him all that happened in Somakanta's previous life by way of determining the root cause of his present trouble.

Somakanta is his previous life was a Vaisya-Kamanda by name. After his father's death, he become a wanton boy indulging in all sorts of undesirable activities; consequently his wife (kutumbini) abandoned him. He went to a forest and started persecuting innocent passers by including Brahmins. Once a Brahmin, Gunavadhans by name was caught by him. Gunavardhana tried his best to invite his compassionate treatment towards himself. But Matanga did not spare him even and thereby subjected himself to his infallible curse. When he was old, he repented for his misdeeds and tried to donate the entire plundered wealth to the deserving Brahmins. But none of them agreed to oblige him due to his unpardonable deeds of the past. He then spent his accumulation on the repair of an old deploded temple of Gaṇeśa. When he died and was about to

be reborn, he was asked:

“What would you like to enjoy first-punya or Papa”?

Matanga preferred to enjoy punya first. So he enjoyed the royal honour, happiness, good health first. He has, thereafter, fallen a victim to the evil fruits of sinful acts in the form of leprosy in this birth.

Thus Bhrgu tells Somakanta all about his previous birth and continuity of the fruits of his misdeeds. Somakanta does not however, believe in the story. At this, several birds start attacking him and eating his flesh. The sage, propitiated, however, saves the situation just through his Humkara and the birds fly away. Somakanta is now fully convinced for the futility of his skepticism and falls at the feet of the sage and as advised by the latter has a dip in the pond. The sage also recites the name of Gaṇeśa one hundred and eight times and sprinkles the “mantrita” water on the king. Soon thereafter a monstrous Papapurusa comes out of the body of the king. The sage commands the Papapurusa to take shelter in a nearby tree. As soon as he enters the tree, it is burnt to ashes. The king is now free from ailments. The sage then advised him to listen to Gaṇeśapurana and predicts that if he faithfully listens to him,

slowly and gradually the fallen tree will start growing and as soon as it is grown up into a fullfledged tree, he will be absolutely free from all ailments. The sage further says that Vyasa and originally obtained this story from Brahma and that he was able to get it from Vyasa himself. So at this stage Bhrgu retales the story in the form of a dialogue between Brahma and Vyasa. It is stated that as Brahma started working on the eighteen Puranas without propitiating Gaṇeśa. He was not able to go ahead with his plans, (ओषधीभिश्च मन्त्रैश्च भगवोर्य इवाहिराट् । तस्तस्मै स्वात्मनि भृशं तद्धेतुं नाध्यगच्छत ॥ I.10.6) he approached Brahma and sought his help. The Brahma told him that all this happened due to the latter's negligence with regard to the propitiation of Gaṇeśa (स्मरणं वा गणेशस्य प्रारम्भे न्यस्य वा तथा । न कृतं च त्वया व्यास तेन भ्रान्तिस्तवाभवत् ॥ id. 25). So bhrgu repeats the Gaṇeśapurana as originally recited by Brahma to Vyasa.

Somakanta, faithfully, listens to Gaṇeśapurana ending with Vyasas Gaṇeśa-worship and the consequential boon of omniscience. So the king is not only free from all his ailments but he also attains divinity and leaves for his divine abode by a divine Vimana revisiting Devanagara - his former capital in Saurashtra.

This is in a nutshell, the central theme of Sriganespuranam. As usual, there are, however, hundreds of episodes, subepisodes within episodes relating to Gaṇeśa as a Supreme Divine Being who along is responsible even for distribution of work among the great divine Trio. There comes the story of Tripura Vadha, Madhukaitabha-Vadha, Parasurama, Kartikeya and other well known and also not too familiar mythological figures. Gaṇeśa Sahasra nama (I. 46) Durvamahatmya (I.62-67), and Srimad-Gaṇeśagita significance. Several Gaṇeśa Festivals and Gaṇeśa Tirthas are also mentioned throughout as part of the episodes.

The Gaṇeśa Purana is divided into two Khandas, viz. Upasanakhanda and Kridakhanda. The former consists of 92 chapters (4093 verses) while the latter, of 155 chapters (6986 verses). Taken all together, there are 11079 verses in this Purana.

For a more comprehensive study and a detailed information about this Purana in general and the tradition of Gaṇeśa worship in particular, I would like to invite the attention of readers to the two scholarly articles by R.C. Hazra, viz. The Gaṇeśa Purana (Journal of Gauganath Jha Research Institute, Vol. X, pp. 72-99) and Ganapati worship and the Upapuranas

dealing with it (id Vol. V. Part 4 pp. 263-276) reprinted in Dr. R.C. Hazra Commemorative Volume (of the Purana Bulletin) Part I (All India Kashi Raj Trust, Varanasi) pp. 211-242. One of the specially interesting points specially observed by Hazra is quoted below:

“By its directions that in Gaṇeśa-worship, the twenty-one names of this deity are to be recited (Gan. I. 46. 215-7 and 69.46f), that twenty one fruits (I. 69.55) and twenty-one twigs of Durva grass are to be offered to Gaṇeśa (I. 49.62, 69.46 and 47.8), that the worshipper is to go around the images of the deity twenty one times (I. 49.62), that at least twenty-one Brahmins are to be honoured and fed on the occasion (I.51.45 and 47. 9-10) and that twenty-one types of gifts are to be made to these Brahmins (I.87.10) and that twenty-one coins (mudrah) are to be given to the priest as his honorarium (daksina) (I.87.7), the Gaṇeśa Purana seems to regard the number twentyone” as a sacred one” (Commem. Volume pp. 228.9)

As a student of imagery in Sanskrit literature, I am specially Enamored of the imagery (both traditional poetic formulaic as well as original) as found in Ganespurana. I hope, scholars will

pay special attention, also to this aspect of this Purana.

I take this opportunity to congratulate M/S Nag Publishers for bringing out this Purana and their assurances to bring out more and more Puranas and Upapuranas but for which we remain ignorant of our ever-growing great cultural Heritage.

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